



Workforce Leadership Academy Applicant Overview

Center for the Future of Arizona and Pima Community College, the Aspen Institute, and local stakeholders are partnering to offer a second Workforce Leadership Academy (WLA) for workforce development professionals in Southern Arizona.

Why offer a Southern Arizona Workforce Leadership Academy?

A high-capacity, responsive, agile workforce ecosystem is critical for sustainable, equitable economic growth in a region. The workforce ecosystem is inherently interdisciplinary, involving many fields of practice, types of organizations, and government policies across various industries, firms, educational institutions, nonprofits, and public sector agencies. Workforce Leadership Academies bring together leaders from across local workforce ecosystems. Academies are targeted to senior-level managers of nonprofit organizations, public agencies, businesses and industry associations, union-based training efforts, community colleges and universities, and other institutions across the workforce ecosystem. By investing in leaders' knowledge, skills, and relationships, the Workforce Leadership Academies are well-positioned to build nimble collaboration so important to the ecosystem's success. Since 2014, the Aspen Institute's Economic Opportunities Program has worked with local organizations to deliver 22 Workforce Leadership Academies in 17 cities with more than 370 participants.

What is the Workforce Leadership Academy?

The 2025 Southern Arizona Academy, in partnership with the Aspen Institute's Economic Opportunities Program, will strengthen the capacity of participants to develop and sustain effective workforce strategies, collaborate more deeply with employers and other strategic partner organizations, and expand the number and quality of leaders who advance opportunities for workers while meeting the talent needs of employers. In a 10-month series of retreats, in-person and online sessions, and action learning projects, Academy participants work with leading practitioners throughout the country, are introduced to practical planning tools, and have the rare opportunity to reflect on and strategize about how to apply principles that underlie effective workforce strategies to their local economic and social context. Participants bring systems thinking and racial equity to all aspects of their work, including their organizations, the labor market, and the local ecosystem. They also engage in leadership development activities, including a 360-degree leadership assessment. Through Collaborative Learning Labs (CoLabs), the Academy provides a forum for local leaders to collaboratively identify local and regional systems-based challenges and create shared solutions. Fellows will inform the field of skills-based mobility by contributing perspectives and lessons on talent strategies that increase equity and advancement in the labor market. After the academy concludes, we will continue to engage for a year-long to activate the new strategies and solutions.

Participants are recognized as Fellows of the Workforce Leadership Academy and become part of the Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Fellows Network upon completion.

What Are Skills-First Talent Strategies? The growing movement toward skills-based mobility seeks to frame talent development around defined skills, ultimately reducing disparities in career opportunities and increasing productivity and agility in business operations. For-profit businesses, nonprofit organizations, and public agencies can incorporate, for example, job description qualifications that are defined by actual skills and knowledge related to roles rather than defaulted only to degrees obtained; candidate sourcing from a broad base of talent pools that extend beyond customary channels; selection and hiring processes that eliminate biases that might exist in traditional practices; consistent employee support and training with well-defined learning outcomes that advance careers; and a culture that reflects organization-wide demonstration of commitment to racial equity, job quality, and mobility. For a comprehensive guide to skills-first talent strategies, see Jobs for the Future's [Skills-Based Practices: An Employer Journey Map](#).

What are the goals of the Southern Arizona Academy?

The Academy seeks to enable Fellows to:

- Expand and deepen professional networks and partnerships;
- Strengthen leadership practices for organizational and systems change efforts;
- Apply a race equity lens to assess and improve workforce systems and strategies;
- Apply systems change framework to their work;
- Understand and apply elements of effective organizational strategies; and
- Work collaboratively to identify local and regional systems-based challenges and create shared solutions.

Who is qualified to participate?

Potential Fellows are:

- Located and working within Southern Arizona (Pima, Santa Cruz, Cochise, and Yuma).
- Working within nonprofit organizations, business associations, community colleges and universities, union-based training efforts, public agencies, economic development, and community-based organizations providing workforce-related services and/or research, educational institutions, chambers of commerce, economic development agencies, City/County/State agencies, professional business or industry associations, labor union and management partnerships, and philanthropic organization or funders' collaborative.
- In a position of leadership and decision-making authority related to workforce development efforts, with the capacity and ability to execute strategies on behalf of their organization.
- Engaged in or planning workforce development efforts in Southern Arizona related to connecting workers to quality jobs and/or career pathways.
- Interested in designing and implementing effective strategies to strengthen their local workforce system.
- Committed to achieving equity across race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation.
- Eager to collaborate with others in their local workforce system, reflect on their current work, explore leadership practices, and gain feedback from colleagues.

Inclusivity and diversity are core values of the Southern Arizona Workforce Leadership Academy. Applicants of color are strongly encouraged to apply. The cohort of Fellows will be selected to represent the diversity of organization type, industry focus, as well as race, ethnicity, and gender.

What is my commitment?

The Southern Arizona Academy is a significant investment of time (outlined below) as well as a commitment to constructively engage with colleagues from across the workforce ecosystem. Fellows also commit to preparation before sessions (readings, assessment, videos) and continued learning, application, and collaboration between workshop sessions. In addition, Fellows will engage in collaborative project work across a small team of Fellows.

Dates & Times	Activities	Location
February 4 (9:00-10:00 a.m.)	Orientation	Zoom
March 5-6	Opening Retreat (<i>2 days and 1 mandatory overnight</i>)	In-person in Tucson, AZ
March 12 (4:00-5:00 p.m.)	Advisory Council meet-n-greet	Zoom
April 9 (8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.)	Session 1	Zoom
April 22 (2:00-5:00 p.m.)	CoLab 1	Zoom
May 7 (8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.)	Session 2	Zoom
May 22 (2:00-5:00 p.m.)	CoLab 2	Zoom
June 11 (8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.)	Session 3	Zoom
June 17 (1:00-5:00 p.m.)	CoLab 3	Pima Community College – Downtown Campus
August 6 (8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.)	Session 4	Zoom
August 14 (10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.)	LPI 360 Feedback Workshop	Zoom
August 19 (1:00-7:00 p.m.)	CoLab 4 (1-4:00 p.m.)	Pima Community College – Downtown Campus
	Mid-Academy Networking Event with Advisory Council (5-7:00 p.m.)	Restaurant in Tucson, AZ
September 10 (8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.)	Session 5	Zoom
September 16 (8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.)	CoLab 5	Pima Community College – Downtown Campus
October 22-23	Closing Retreat (<i>2 days and 1 mandatory overnight</i>)	Pima Community College – Downtown Campus
November 14 (8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.)	CoLab Stakeholder Event (8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.)	Pima Community College – Downtown Campus
	Fellow Celebration Lunch (1:00-3:00 p.m.)	Restaurant in Tucson, AZ
November 19 (9:00-11:00 a.m.)	Closing Session	Zoom
TBA	ASPEN Alumni Assembly	Zoom

Dates & Times	Activities	Location
January 9, 2026 (10:00–11:00 a.m.)	CFA WLA Network Assembly	Zoom
<i>*Ongoing during Academy</i>	<i>Continued learning, application, and collaboration between workshop sessions (self-directed time of up to 2 hours between sessions as well as 9 to 12 hours of collaborative project work across a small team of Fellows over the entirety of the academy)</i>	

Is there a cost to participate?

The program cost per participant is \$650.00 from the organization where the Fellow works, which assists with meeting costs and program materials. Financial assistance is available on a limited basis to those with financial needs to ensure that cost is not a barrier to participation.

Application Process and Deadline

The 2025 Southern Arizona Workforce Leadership Academy application deadline is December 6th at 11:59 p.m. Please go ahead and indicate your interest as soon as possible by beginning the application; you may continue working on it until the deadline.

Applications will be reviewed and approved by members of the 2025 Southern Arizona Workforce Leadership Academy Local Advisory Council.

All applicants will be notified of the status of their applications by December 23, 2024.

The submission materials include:

- Full Application submitted online
- Your resume or link to your LinkedIn page
- Organizational chart
- Letter of reference from an external collaboration partner or a supervisor
- Commitment to Participate form signed by you
- Authorization to Participate form signed by your supervisor

Informational Webinar

To learn more about the Academy and the application process, join an informational webinar in November 2024,

Register for the webinar:

- [Thursday, November. 7 at 12:00 p.m.](#)
- [Tuesday, November. 19 at 8:00 a.m.](#)

2025 Southern Arizona Workforce Leadership Academy Local Advisory Council

- Maria Ahumada, Deputy Administrator, Arizona Department of Economic Security, Workforce Development Administration
- Barbra Coffee, Director, Economic Initiatives, City of Tucson, Economic Initiatives
- Susan Dumon, Senior Vice-President, Sun Corridor Inc.
- Rob Elias, President & CEO, Tucson Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Dr. Francisco Garcia — Deputy County Administrator, Pima County Arizona@Work
- Mark Gaspers, VP of Government Relations at Boeing and Tucson Workforce Board Member at Arizona@Work
- Michael Guymon, President & CEO, Tucson Metro Chamber
- Melissa Hernandez — Associate Vice President, Cradle to Career Partnership, United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona
- Merril Kemp-Wilcox — Director of Research Development, Pima JTED
- Todd Jaeger, Superintendent, Amphitheater Public Schools
- Greg Madril, Director, Workforce Development, Tribal Nations, Pascua-Yaqui
- Ted Maxwell, President, Southern Leadership Council
- Krista McGarvey, Business Operations Manager, Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity
- Kathy Prather — Superintendent, Pima JTED
- Dr. Ian Roark — Vice Chancellor, Workforce Development & Innovation, Pima Community College
- Dr. Kasey Urquidez, Vice President, Enrollment Management & Dean of Undergraduate Admissions, University of Arizona

Academy Facilitation Team

- Holly Kurtz, Director, Workforce Development, Center for the Future of Arizona
- Tennille Penalzoza-Hagen, Project Manager, Workforce Development, Center for the Future of Arizona
- Amanda Abens, MC, Dean of Workforce Development and Continuing Education, Pima Community College

Center for the Future of Arizona

[Center for the Future of Arizona](#) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan "do-tank" that brings Arizonans together to create a stronger and brighter future for our state. Through our survey research & reports, Arizona Progress Meters, and impact initiatives & programs, we listen to Arizonans to learn what matters most to them, share trusted data about how Arizona is doing in those priority areas, bring critical issues to public attention, and work with communities and leaders to solve public problems.

CFA leads impact initiatives and programs across the state and has deep and ongoing engagement in the areas of education, workforce development, and civic health, recognizing how essential these are to advancing economic prosperity, quality of life, and opportunity for all.

Pima Community College

Pima Community College is a comprehensive two-year institution serving students and employers throughout Pima County in Arizona and beyond. We welcome everyone striving to achieve a better life for themselves, their families and their communities.

Students have access to a broad range of high-quality programs that prepare them with the skills needed by today's employers and to transfer successfully into four-year programs. Students benefit from Pima's lower tuition costs and thrive at the highest levels once they transfer.

Pima is in rapid transition to a high-tech institution serving the needs of our region's growing aerospace, defense and healthcare industries. Developing Centers for Excellence in key areas such as Applied Technology, Information Technology and Health Professions, Pima is focused on strengthening partnerships and expanding employer engagement in order to ensure that today's students are prepared now and for many years to come. For more information, visit pima.edu

The Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program

The Aspen Institute is a global nonprofit organization committed to realizing a free, just, and equitable society. Founded in 1949, the Institute drives change through dialogue, leadership, and action to help solve the most important challenges facing the United States and the world.

The Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program (EOP) advances strategies, policies, and ideas to help low- and moderate-income people thrive in a changing economy. We recognize that race, gender, and place intersect with and intensify the challenge of economic inequality and we address these dynamics by advancing an inclusive vision of economic justice. For over 25 years, EOP has focused on expanding individuals' opportunities to connect to quality work, start businesses, and build economic stability that provides the freedom to pursue opportunity.

Contact

For more information, contact Tennille.Penalosa@arizonafuture.org

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Application Preview

CONTACT INFORMATION

1. Contact Information

First name:

Last name:

Job title:

Organization:

City:

County of service/work (select all that apply):

State (2-letter abbreviation):

Zip Code:

Phone:

Email:

Organization website URL:

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

2. Racial/ethnic identity. Select all that apply.

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or of African descent
- Latinx or Hispanic
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White
- Prefer to Self-Describe: [text box]
- Prefer Not to Answer

3. Gender identity. Select all that apply.

- Woman
- Man
- Transgender
- Non-Binary/Third Gender
- Prefer to Self-Describe: [text box]
- Prefer Not to Answer

4. What is your age?

- 18 to 34
 - 35 to 54
 - 55 to 64
 - 65 or older
5. What is the highest degree or level of school that you have completed? If you are currently enrolled, please select the previous grade or highest degree received.
- Some high school
 - High school diploma or equivalency
 - Some college credits
 - Associate's degree
 - Bachelor's degree
 - Some graduate coursework
 - Master's degree
 - Doctorate
 - Other certificates (please specify): _____

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND DETAILS

4. Which of the following **best** describes your organization?
- Community-based organization or nonprofit (Note: if you are a workforce development board incorporated as a nonprofit, please check Workforce development board below)
 - Workforce development board
 - Community or technical college
 - Four-year college or university
 - Secondary education
 - Local government (city/county)
 - State government
 - Labor union or labor-management partnership
 - Industry intermediary or sector partnership
 - Professional, business, or industry association, including chambers of commerce
 - Philanthropic organization or funders' collaborative
 - For-profit skills training provider
 - Economic development agency (public agency)
 - Economic development organization (private or nonprofit)
 - Research
 - Other, please describe: _____
5. Does your organization manage the local workforce development board?
- Yes
 - No

3. How many staff members does your organization employ?

- 1-10
- 11-25
- 26-50
- 51-75
- 76-100
- 101-200
- Over 200

4. How many staff members do you supervise? _____

5. Does your organization work in or target a specific sector? Select all that apply.

- This does not apply
- Aerospace and defense
- Agriculture and food production
- Bio-medical
- Building and construction
- Education
- Energy and resilience
- Film, arts, and media
- Financial and professional services
- Forestry and fire safety
- Government
- Health care
- Information technology
- Leisure and hospitality
- Manufacturing
- Mining
- Retail or wholesale trade
- Services
- Transportation, distribution, and logistics
- Utilities
- Water and blue economy
- Other sector (please specify)_____

6. If your organization provides direct services to particular customer groups, what is the **primary** focus of your services?

- Direct services to job seekers
 - Please indicate any primary job seeker focus, if applicable; e.g., returning citizens, etc.:
- Direct services to business and industry
- Worker organizing and worker rights advocacy
- Other (please describe):

- Does not apply
7. In which activities is your organization engaged? Check all that apply.
- Adult basic education, literacy, ESOL, or high school equivalency
 - Skills training; e.g., pre-apprenticeship, certification, customized, etc.
 - Work-based learning; e.g., transitional jobs, on-the-job training, internships
 - Formal apprenticeships
 - Counseling or case management
 - Benefits or work supports; e.g., transportation, child care, housing, etc.
 - Job readiness/job search skills
 - Job matching/Connecting people to employment
 - Youth/young adult education or training
 - Business consulting/technical assistance
 - Capital deployment/investing/lending
 - Community development finance
 - Economic development
 - Employee ownership promotion/support
 - Worker organizing
 - Worker voice and engagement
 - Community organizing
 - Convening of multiple stakeholders
 - Grantmaking/philanthropy
 - Policy advocacy
 - Public policymaking
 - Public administration
 - Research
 - Other (please list): _____

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

8. For how many years have you worked in the workforce development field?
- Less than 2 years
 - More than 2 years, but less than 5 years
 - More than 5 years, but less than 10 years
 - More than 10 years
9. Please tell us about your current role and responsibilities. Include how your role is focused on improving opportunity and equity for low-income people. (300 words max)
10. Please state why you entered and are engaged in the workforce development field. Be sure to address what roles you have had in the past and what your future aspirations are. (300 words max)

PERSONAL LEADERSHIP AND GOALS

11. What goals do you have for participating in the Workforce Leadership Academy? Include your personal goals, goals for your organization or program/initiative, and goals for the region's workforce system. (300 words max)
12. The Workforce Leadership Academy is interested in supporting leaders who are open to self-reflection about their own continuing development. In what ways would you like to develop and grow your leadership skills? (300 words max)

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

13. A focus on partnerships and collaboration is a key element of the Workforce Leadership Academy. Provide an example of a current or recent partnership with another organization(s). Describe the goals, your role, what was rewarding, and what was challenging. (300 words max)

SKILLS-FIRST TALENT STRATEGIES SELF-ASSESSMENT

We are interested in learning more about the range of interests and maturity across organizations and systems in skill-based mobility efforts. There are no "correct" answers! These practices are from the [Skills-Based Practices: An Employer Journey Map](#) from [Jobs for the Future](#):

1. Job requirements
2. Sourcing strategies
3. Candidate assessment
4. Hiring protocols
5. Post-hire support
6. Advancement opportunities
7. Organizational culture

Please refer to the descriptions of these strategies on the table below to answer the following four questions.

1. Organizational maturity – rate your own organization's maturity in each of these elements from 1 to 3. We recognize that the descriptions might not perfectly describe the status of your practices, but please assess as possible from a low of 1 to a high of 3.

2. Ecosystem maturity – rate your workforce ecosystem’s (industry, employment programs, workforce boards, community colleges, public agencies, etc.) maturity in these elements from 1-3.
3. Organizational interest – which three of these seven elements are most compelling for your own organization to further explore and advance? Choose your top three.
4. Ecosystem urgency – which three of these seven practices are most urgent for your workforce ecosystem to address or further develop? Choose your top three.

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

14. Organizational chart of your organization or division. The chart should show your supervisors as well as staff reporting to you. [Upload file]
15. Your resume OR a link to your LinkedIn profile Please choose one of the following options:
 - Link to my LinkedIn public profile:
 - Resume attachment
16. A Letter of Recommendation from either an individual who has direct responsibility for overseeing your work OR from an external partner with whom you work directly. The letter should include the referee’s relationship to you, a description of your strengths and achievements, and comments on how you might benefit from and contribute to the Academy. [Enter email to send request for recommendation]
17. Review the Commitment to Participate before signing below. [Electronic signature]
17. The Authorization to Participate must be signed electronically by your supervisor. Enter your supervisor’s email address below. Your supervisor will receive an email with a link to review and sign. [Electronic signature]

Commitment to Participate Preview

I understand that the [CITY/REGION] Workforce Leadership Academy engages leaders who seek to deepen networks; strengthen systems leadership skills; apply race, equity, and systems change frameworks to leaders' work; and deepen understanding of effective strategies and programs. The Academy includes both in-person and online activities. Specifically:

- A virtual 90-minute orientation
- An opening two-day retreat (one overnight)
- Five Academy session days and five Collaborative Labs held during the same week:
 - four sessions online via Zoom
 - two labs held online via Zoom
 - three labs held in-person
- One leadership 360 assessment process and debrief workshop
- A closing two-day retreat (one overnight)
- Collaborative Learning Lab presentations at an in-person stakeholder event - FINAL EVENT
- Reception event for supervisors and advisors
- Aspen Institute-conducted all-Academies virtual events, including skills- first practices webinars and national exchanges (1-2 dates TBD)
- Partners may also decide to offer additional networking and social events.
- Continued learning, application, and collaboration between workshop sessions (self-directed time of up to two hours between sessions as well as nine to 12 hours of collaborative project work across a small team of Fellows)
- Completion of all evaluation surveys, including enrollment, session feedback, midpoint reflection, and follow-up.

I understand that while unexpected or emergency situations might necessitate my absence, more than one absence from any session or lab could lead to my withdrawal from the Academy (applicants should confirm their availability for the Opening Retreat before submitting the application).

I also understand the program cost per participant is \$650 from the Fellow's organization which assists with meeting costs and program materials. Financial assistance is available on an as-needed basis.

By typing my full name in the application, I agree that if selected for the [LOCAL SITE NAME] Workforce Leadership Academy, I will commit to full participation in all Academy activities including those listed above. I also commit to engage fully with colleagues across the workforce system, reflect on my practice as a leader, and develop or deepen my strategies.

[Electronic Signature]

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

Letter of Recommendation Form Preview

(Referee Information)

First Name:

Last Name:

Organization:

Title:

Email address:

Please use this space to include a letter of recommendation for the Academy applicant. The letter should include your relationship with the applicant, a description of their strengths and achievements, and comments on how they might benefit from and contribute to the Academy.

[letter]

Authorization to Participate Preview

The [CITY/REGION] Workforce Leadership Academy is designed for workforce development professionals who hold a position of influence and responsibility sufficient to develop and lead strategic change initiatives within their organization and in partnership with others in the region.

As Executive Director, Chairman of the Board of Directors, President, or other senior executive responsible for overseeing the work of the applicant, my electronic signature indicates that the applicant holds a level of authority within the organization sufficient to implement a specific initiative or strategy if approved through my organization's internal protocol and policies and is able to initiate or partner with others across the workforce ecosystem..

By typing my full name below, I fully support the applicant's participation in the Workforce Leadership Academy. I understand that, if selected to participate, the applicant will be required to participate in all Academy activities, as listed below. I also understand that, if selected to participate, the applicant will be required to invest additional time to successfully complete the Academy, including time between structured sessions. I confirm that I have reviewed the specific dates for the Academy activities.

Overview of Academy Activities:

- A virtual 90-minute orientation
- An opening two-day retreat (one overnight)
- Five Academy session days and five Collaborative Labs held during the same week:
 - four sessions online via Zoom
 - two labs held online via Zoom
 - three labs held in-person
- One leadership 360 assessment process and debrief workshop
- A closing two-day retreat (one overnight)
- Collaborative Learning Lab presentations at an in-person stakeholder event - FINAL EVENT
- Reception event for supervisors and advisors
- Aspen Institute-conducted all-Academies virtual events, including skills- first practices webinars and national exchanges (1-2 dates TBD)
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- Completion of all evaluation surveys, including enrollment, session feedback, midpoint reflection, and follow-up.

I understand that while unexpected or emergency situations might necessitate the Fellow's absence, more than one absence from any session or lab could lead to withdrawal from the Academy (applicants should confirm their availability for the Opening Retreat before submitting the application).

I also understand the program cost per participant is \$650 from the Fellow's organization which assists with meeting costs and program materials. Financial assistance is available on an as-needed basis.

[Electronic Signature]

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